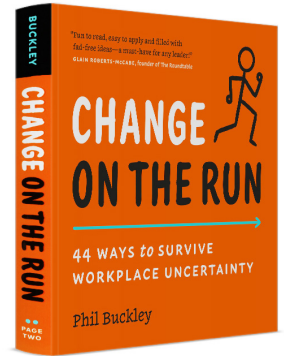


Change On The Run

44 Ways to Survive Workplace Uncertainty

by **Phil Buckley**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

The only thing you can rely on in today's workplace is uncertainty. Between mergers and acquisitions, layoffs and team shuffles, pandemics and recessions, only the nimble survive. *Change On The Run* is your secret weapon to navigating it all.

Being successful in change is not about being perfect; it's about being fast and effective so you can move on to the next task or challenge. Written for the time-strapped manager, *Change on the Run* will help you line them up and knock them down. It's a laser-focused guide to navigating your way through disruption, without any time-consuming fluff or theory.

Change management expert Phil Buckley gives you tried-and-true survival strategies for responding to transitions and disruptions as quickly as possible. For each, Buckley applies his 80/20 rule—homing in on one action that will deliver 80 percent results in 20 percent of the time, with three key steps to achieving it.

Change is the norm in business. Let *Change On The Run* help you navigate it.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To assess your strengths and set personal goals.
- To develop a business case and a vision for change, as well as a plan for how to make it happen.
- To empathize with others, earn trust, and change your culture.
- To address resistance and make change stick.

Welcome From Your Coach!

Uncertainty is now a workplace norm, and quickly managing change is a must-have survival and success capability. The following 22 tips, sampled from the full set of 44, provide advice on key tasks that most people face during a change initiative, in a format that's easy to absorb.

It's direct and to the point because you don't have time for theory or fluff. Each task includes the one action that will give you the best outcomes when you are short of time.

Under stress, people will often try many things at the same time, hoping the choices they make will resolve the situation—the more the better. This approach gives you poor results and a reputation for not being your best.

A better approach is to focus your energy and resources on the one action that will give you 80 percent of the results you want with 20 percent of the time and effort.

The number of workplace changes and the speed with which they are emerging have never been higher or faster. Being successful in change is not about being perfect; it's about being effective and fast so you can move on to the next task or challenge. These strategies help you line them up and knock them down.

Part One: Managing Me

Assessing Your Strengths

Everyone goes through a personal transition when their company goes through a business transition—this is normal. Most cope with the stress by busying themselves with change-related tasks, and often become overwhelmed from having too much work to do in the too-little time available.

A better approach is to first take stock of what you do well. Reviewing actions you do well is a good start to creating your inventory of change skills. Examples of actions are planning, motivating people, and problem solving.

Your past performance reviews can reveal patterns of these types of actions and behaviors that have served you well. Your network is another source of feedback on strengths. Examine skills you've observed, skills your manager has observed, and skills your team members have observed.

Ask people for two inputs: what you do well and what your “watch-out” areas are. Most people will give you balanced views. Once you have completed your research, pick your

best three strengths to leverage when completing your tasks, knowing they will assist you in any situation.

Setting Your Personal Goals

An organizational change project provides real opportunities for personal growth because it's dynamic, complex, and involves people at all levels and areas of work. Without personal goals, you're more likely to focus on completing tasks with little thought to increasing your abilities.

One of the first things you should do after joining a project is to decide how you want the experience to benefit you: How will you grow? Three areas of development will give you the highest return: skills (what you do well), behaviors (how you act toward others), and relationships (a connection you share with someone).

Knowledge (what you know) is the fourth, but focus on the first three for now.

Skills, behaviors, and the ability to connect with others are types of leadership capability. Telling the story about how you achieved all three is part of your career leadership narrative. To create that narrative, write down a goal for each category and what success looks like for each. Then track your progress over the project.

Optimizing Your Limited Time

Most people have fewer resources to fulfill their change role than they need, and so must choose which activities are most important. Of all the tasks you need to perform, prioritize spending time with leaders as they are making decisions. These moments will determine the success of your project and will define where your knowledge and experience are needed most.

Status meetings are crucial to the success of change initiatives because this is where leaders review progress, evaluate risks, and make decisions, including on the allocation of resources. If you know what's being decided at these meetings, you can influence what data is presented and what questions get asked.

The better briefed leaders are, the better they will be at making the right decisions.

What decisions are project leaders making that will impact the success of the change? Document each decision, the decision makers involved, the date of decision, and the information required.

Expect criticism. Try to make sure that your plans and recommendations are better researched than the ones from those who challenge them.

Success tip: If you don't have access to the leader, give the information to someone they rely on for guidance.

Making Decisions

Your most important change activity is to help leaders make decisions. Showing them the implications of their options will lead to better and more supported choices.

Often, decisions must be made quickly, either because there is little time for discussion or something has gone wrong. Listing pros and cons is a fast way to review options in the context of your objectives. Identify three options, and note the pros and cons of each.

Choose the option that best moves you toward achieving your goals. Once you've identified the best option, share it with leaders, and implement it if you have their support. If not, make modifications until all leaders support it.

Sometimes, you'll need to pivot to another option if leaders reject your first pick. If this happens, try to build in some elements of your best option to increase the probability of its success.

William B. Given, Jr. says, "When possible make the decisions now, even if action is in the future. A reviewed decision usually is better than one reached at the last moment."

You might say, "Based on the information we have now, this is the best way to proceed."

Addressing An Emergency

Too often, people panic during an emergency. The "fight, flight, or freeze" response kicks in, emotions flare up, and reactions intensify. With all this commotion, most people don't focus on addressing the crisis, assuming others will take the lead.

Emergencies are excellent opportunities to take charge and show what you're capable of.

Ask these questions:

- "What are the facts?" Speak to those closest to the

situation to gather facts.

- "What can we do to avoid or stop the damage?" Discuss options, gain agreement, and then suggest who's best to activate the option you've agreed on.
- "What do I need to communicate to stakeholders?" Once you neutralize the situation, identify the steps needed to return to normal operations. After getting agreement, communicate the recovery plan to leaders and others. Afterward, review what worked and what didn't to guide how you'll respond to future situations.

Pro tip: When people are panicking, they respond best to their name. "Raj, what do we need to do?" solicits the best response.

Responding to Criticism

It makes sense that people have different views on what needs to be done, because major change initiatives are generally built on assumptions and incomplete knowledge.

Expect criticism. Try to make sure that your plans and recommendations are better researched than the ones from those who challenge them. The best response to critics is to ask for facts that support their view. Responding with "Tell me more" or "That's interesting; based on what evidence?" will invite the person to share their rationale.

If the rationale is not strong, you can present your justification and move on. If their idea is right, acknowledge the new information and say you'll incorporate it into your work. In the long run, they've done you a favor.

Sometimes people make up information to support their concerns. Viewpoints can appear factual when said with authority and confidence. Asking critics to support their contentions with empirical evidence generally separates truth from fiction.

Don't say "You're wrong" or "That's not true."

Success tip: Anticipating criticisms and rehearsing your responses to them will avoid emotional responses when you're asked to defend your views.

Identifying Your Lessons Learned

Learning occurs in the moment. Something worked or didn't work because of specific factors, and we often lose learnings we don't record quickly. This is especially true in the middle of projects because we tend to remember only beginnings and endings, leaving the key middle ground foggy.

Documenting the context and details of your observations immediately while they are fresh in your mind gives you the best learning. Keeping a daily log, either paper or electronic, will help when you create a project summary. The details you record will enhance the stories you tell about what you did and how you did it.

Follow this lessons-learned assessment:

- “What worked well that I would want to repeat?”
- “What didn't work well that I wouldn't?”
- “What surprised me?”

Pro tip: Recording quotes from what people say will increase the accuracy and credibility of your lessons learned.

Part Two: Managing the Work

Developing a Business Case for Change

Only 7 percent of employees completely understand their company's business goals and strategies and what they need to do to help achieve them.

A business case identifies the anticipated benefits of making a change and the investment required to implement it. Benefits include increased sales, profit and/or market share; decreased costs; greater customer service; and retention of talent. These gains need to be greater than the investment of resources required to secure them: money, time, skills, and leadership attention.

The best business cases demonstrate how the proposed change will activate strategies chosen by leaders to achieve their goals.

First, identify the published goals and strategies that the change can contribute to. Next, estimate the benefits and costs of your project as suggested by articles, case studies, etc. Finally, create a narrative that describes how the change will improve the organization.

Statistics by themselves do not make persuasive cases. Leaders and teams are more likely to support changes they can

imagine. Painting pictures through stories and metaphors makes them tangible and relevant.

Creating a Vision for the Change

Provide a compelling picture of a better future, a future that aligns with this leadership question: “What does the company aspire to become?”

Once this is set, it acts as a North Star to align goals, strategies, and the resources to achieve them. Effective visions paint a picture of a different, better, and compelling future that the organization and its employees will benefit from.

Ask these questions:

- “What will be different (reason to believe)?”
- “Why will it be better?”
- “What will intrigue people about the future (what's cool)?”

Presenting the business need for these desired outcomes is necessary because it justifies the changes required to achieve it. People also need to know how the changes will affect them. Without this information, they're likely to believe and fear worst-case scenarios and make faulty assumptions.

McKinsey & Company reports that success is 6.3 times likelier when senior leaders share aligned messages about the change effort.

Outlining people's roles (attending training sessions, testing a new process, etc.) in adopting the change is important when sharing the vision. Being clear about what they need to do for the change to be successful gives them a sense of purpose and reminds them that their contributions are important.

Creating a Change Plan

A good change plan describes how people will be able to adopt the change. There are three sections of an effective change plan: communication, training, and engagement.

Communication describes how people will get information, e.g., through emails, town hall meetings, newsletters, etc. Training captures skill-building activities, including learning sessions, coaching, and process walkthroughs. Engagement includes feedback opportunities such as plan review meetings, interviews, and surveys.

For each section, outline what will happen in month one, month two, and month three.

Resist the temptation to make your plan long and complex. Many people believe a big plan is better, but the longer and more complex it is, the harder it is to communicate and implement. The best plans are easy to understand and follow. The worst response to a plan is, “I don’t get it.”

Pro tip: Creating a plan early, even if you don’t have a lot of information, will set a path to follow and demonstrate that you are in control.

Competing For Resources

Most organizations take on change agendas that are larger than the resources available to implement them. Leaders struggle to prioritize multiple change initiatives because they all provide benefits, and generally there are differing views on which ones will deliver the most value.

Securing adequate resources to implement your plan is one of the most important negotiations you’ll have. Meet with each stakeholder to better understand the benefits they’ll get from your change. Greater detail backed by credible endorsements will make them more tangible and perhaps more valuable when compared to other projects, securing the resources you need.

Ask, “Why should your project receive resources over others?” Build your case by outlining the stakeholders, benefits, examples, and quotes. The better you can describe the project benefits, the more valuable and more worthy of the resources required to attain them they become.

Communicating Effectively

Communication is the most important form of support people receive when going through a work transition. It’s also one of the biggest enablers of successful change because it aligns everyone on their understanding of what’s changing, why it’s necessary, how it will affect them and what they must do to adopt it.

Setting up a frequent and consistent communication schedule creates the expectation that people will receive regular updates from leaders and the project team. Communicating honestly in ways that your audience can relate to creates the perception that these messages are the best sources of information.

You must regularly communicate even when there is nothing new to share. If you don’t, rumors and speculation fill the void, and such counter-narratives will seem credible, distract people, and increase anxiety.

What are your audience’s communication preferences? Consider each group, how they are impacted, their hopes and fears, what needs to be communicated, and who the best communicator is.

Success tip: Test your messages with a few members of your audience to avoid (or at least be prepared for) adverse reactions.

Measuring Progress

People give little thought to measurement at the beginning of a project because they’re too absorbed in planning activities.

Spending time up front defining and gaining buy-in for measures will save you considerable heartache throughout the execution phase of your project. The two questions you need to answer are as follows:

- What information can you track that will accurately communicate what you’ve completed at each plan checkpoint?
- Who can provide context around this data? For example, you could track percentage completion of training and include a quote from the participants’ leader, such as, “My team felt the training provided them with everything they need to operate the new system.”

It’s important to get agreement from leaders on what data will be tracked and by whom. The clearer they are about how success will be measured, the more supportive they’ll be at progress reviews.

Pro tip: The only important measures are ones that leaders find of value.

Presenting at a Leadership Review

The most successful leadership reviews are conversations, not presentations. Be sure to engage leaders throughout, encouraging them to share their experiences and voice concerns.

Start each review by stating what you want to accomplish, and invite participants to share their needs. This will focus the leaders on your goals before they review the content. The more you get leaders to participate, including discussing feedback, the more invested they’ll be in the decisions made. Make a mental note of who is contributing and who is silent.

Don’t end the meeting until everyone has said something, even if you need to go around the table for final comments. Sending a summary of agreements to leaders will confirm

that you haven't missed any key points, as well as convey that you're in control.

Say, "Thank you for your active sponsorship and guidance to ensure the project is a success."

Pro tip: Leaders respond best when you speak with them as your equals rather than as your superiors.

Identifying Project Lessons Learned

Managing the closing of a change project is challenging because most leaders and project team members have mentally moved on to their next roles and challenges. A lessons-learned exercise at the end of a change project is essential for building change capability in your organization. It documents which activities worked and should be repeated by other project teams, and which didn't and shouldn't.

The best lessons-learned reviews include members of all stakeholder groups, including leaders, project team members, and those going through the change. Ask representatives of each group to write down three things that worked and three that didn't, and ask them to detail why. Themes will emerge that are best explained by verbatim quotes from the feedback providers.

Scheduling a leader review meeting at the beginning of the project creates an expectation of measurement and a commitment to learning. Booking this meeting into calendars months in advance will increase the likelihood it will happen.

Success tip: Give people examples of areas to assess, e.g., leader support, communication, training.

Part Three: Managing Others

Empathizing With Others

Change management often fails when there's little understanding of, or empathy for, the people who are changing. Without deep knowledge of the environment in which they work, "ivory tower" assumptions guide change planning and lead to generic and ineffective support programs.

You need to understand people's beliefs, perspectives, and concerns before you can effectively help them prepare for change. Spending time with people where they work will give you a good sense of their needs. They know their challenges better than you do, and they know what help they need to overcome them. Ask people about their concerns,

and listen to how they phrase them. This gives you insight into how to support them best as they adopt the change and reduce their resistance to it.

Pro tip: The only way to know what it's like to be seasick is to get in the boat.

Earning Trust

Trust is the foundation of effective collaboration. Without it, people spend their energy protecting themselves from harm. When meeting someone new or learning about a change, people's "fight, flight, or freeze" response is often triggered, causing them to either defend their territory or hide. Both responses add risk and slow you down.

The best way to gain trust is to trust first. Asking for help displays the vulnerability that's essential to transparent and respectful relationships built on honesty. You make a positive connection that can become a lasting bond. It's like asking for a favor. It makes you indebted to the person and demonstrates that you value their support.

The type of help you ask for could be as simple as requesting honest feedback or asking someone to participate in a meeting. The request is more important than the type of help. Offering to return the favor and then doing so establishes reciprocity that propels future trust-based interactions.

Changing Your Culture

All big changes require some form of culture change. This means modifying how people think, interact, and behave. Your challenge is that these traits are deep rooted and difficult to alter.

Since a culture is ultimately defined by leaders' words, actions, and behaviors, leaders must change themselves to change the culture. Identifying the most important new behavior that will enable the change gives leaders and their teams a target to focus on. Think about what the behavior looks, sounds, and feels like. Also, identify the opposite behavior and what it looks, sounds, and feels like.

When leaders model this behavior, they signal to employees the need to work differently to adopt the change.

Note that 86 percent of leaders report that they model desired behavior change, but only 53 percent of the people who report to these leaders agree.

Profiling examples of leaders demonstrating new behaviors

Large change projects require people to work through uncertainty, and their ability to make progress with insufficient information or experience is a must.

speeds up adoption by the people who report to you or work with them.

Furthermore, stopping a contrary behavior quickens the transition toward the new one. For example, if collaboration across teams is the new behavior, calling out information hoarding and poor communication reinforces the commitment to change how people work together.

Building Team Confidence

Large change projects require people to work through uncertainty, and their ability to make progress with insufficient information or experience is a must. Moving forward under these conditions requires confidence that the team is skilled and effective at removing barriers to success.

People are at their best when they are confident in their contributions to meaningful work. Constantly reinforcing your belief in the team (and yourself) will build their confidence to move through uncomfortable and risky territory. People will rise to their potential when you remind them of their abilities and past accomplishments.

Recalling the successful experiences of each team member creates a bridge between past successes and current requirements. Also, reminding people of the skills they used on past projects (and outcomes they achieved) will help convince them they can do it again. Highlighting problem-solving skills suggest they will be able to work through any challenge.

Say “I know your skills and experience will help overcome any challenges we face.”

Success tip: When referencing someone, address them by name, e.g., “Mel, your communication expertise is essential for this project.”

Avoiding Team Burnout

Burnout is a stress-related state of emotional, physical, or mental exhaustion. It occurs when the demands of a job are greater than a person’s ability to manage them. Triggers include long hours, impossible deadlines, little control of

inputs, hostile conditions, and low rewards. In other words, project demands.

The impacts of burnout are devastating—extreme fatigue, loss of motivation, drops in performance, insomnia, feelings of resentment, and hopelessness and illness.

Fortunately, the conditions that lead to burnout are easy to spot: Unrealistic expectations and insufficient resources are visible to all. To minimize burnout, review resource plans for gaps throughout the project. If conditions change (time, resources, scope), communicate imbalances to leaders immediately. Highlighting the risk of failure is the best defense against unrealistic expectations that cause burnout.

Pro tip: Include in team ways of working the permission to declare signs of burnout. This provides a lifeline to those in need and a warning that work and resources are misaligned.

Addressing Resistance

It’s natural for some people to resist change. The organization is asking them to exchange strongly held beliefs and routines for untested and uncomfortable ones.

Resistance can take many forms—from indifference, to not adopting new processes, to sabotage—and you need to address all forms quickly, or your progress will stall. People resist new ways of working for many reasons, including fear of the unknown, loss of control, being overloaded, comfort with the present, disagreement with what’s new, or lack of skills required to succeed.

Address fears head-on because everyone (including leadership) is afraid of some part of the change and, therefore, will resist.

The first step to minimizing resistance is to listen to people’s concerns intently. Their explanations will uncover their fears. Once fears are identified, you can refute them by stating the facts (e.g., “No, we’re not moving the head office”), or explain why the change is necessary and what support will be provided (e.g., “We must move the head office to save money that will be reinvested in new product development. We’ll help you move”).

Pro tip: Demonstrate that you understand people's concerns—e.g., nod your head, ask clarifying questions, restate the explanations. People resist more when they feel their concerns are ignored.

Making Change Stick

It doesn't take long for people to revert to pre-change ways of working once the excitement of go-live fades and the project team disbands; the familiar and comfort of past routines and behaviors are a greater motivator than the benefits gained from change.

For many, consequences both good and bad are necessary to keep them on track. Be clear on what they are (e.g., good: leader praise, high performance rating; bad: leader feedback, low performance rating). Before launching the change, set expectations for everyone, including leaders.

Typically, people will test a leader's resolve to enforce change by keeping one or two old practices. They will take on even more of them if they aren't noticed or if there are no negative consequences. Before long, the continuity of new processes is lost.

People must see leaders follow through on consequences before they take them seriously. Without real consequences, they will revert back to old ways. Quickly issuing consequences, both good and bad, will confirm that leaders are serious about the change and the need to support it.

What consequences will leaders support for good and bad behavior? For example, good (reinforcing) consequences include the following:

- Manager or leader praise;

- Input into performance review;
- Recognition at town hall meeting;
- Profile in newsletter.

Bad (corrective) consequences include

- Manager or leader feedback;
- Input into performance review;
- Change of role;
- Exit.

Success tip: Be clear on the consequences of supporting and not supporting the change before go-live so there are no surprises.

Managing change is like most things in life: One action will give us 80 percent of the benefits in 20 percent of the time.

Let's put this truism into action!

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Disrupt You!: Master Personal Transformation, Seize Opportunity and Thrive in the Era of Endless Innovation* by Jay Samit
- *Change (the) Management: Why We as Leaders Must Change for the Change to Last* by Al Comeaux



Phil Buckley is an award-winning author, coach, public speaker, and senior change management professional with over 32 large-scale change projects under his belt—including co-leading global change management for the \$19.6 billion Kraft Foods acquisition of Cadbury. For the past 25 years, leaders and teams across the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. have relied on him to help them drive performance through change. He is also the author of *Change with Confidence* and host of the Change on the Run podcast.

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